

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02

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FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6612

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY PARIS

UNCLAS NIAMEY 1770

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, NG

SUBJ: PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE'S APRIL 15 SPEECH-THREE YEARS IN POWER

1. NIGER'S MILITARY GOVERNMENT CELEBRATED ITS THIRD YEAR IN POWER APRIL 15. IN A RADIO ADDRESS TO THE NATION ON THE EVE OF THE ANNIVERSARY, PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE PRAISED ARMY'S ROLE, NOTED ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENTS AND TAX RELIEF IN PROSPECT, EXPRESSED HOPE THAT STUDENTS WOULD TAKE RECENT LESSONS TO HEART, AND REITERATED NIGER POSITION ON AFRICAN PROBLEMS.

2. SUMMARIZING MILITARY'S ROLE OVER THE LAST THREE YEAR, KOUNTCHE SAID IT HAD BROUGHT UNITY AND SINGLE-MINDED COORDINATION TO NIGER'S DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS-- QUOTE ONE MOVEMENT, ONE HEART, ONE FAITH UNQUOTE. THIS SINGLE-MINDEDNESS WAS POSSIBLE, HE SAID, BECAUSE THE ARMY HAD UNCLASSIFIED

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NO PLACE FOR PERSONAL AMBITION-- HE PRAISED THE ARMY'S UNITY IN THE 1975 AND 1976 ANTI-GOVERNMENT PLOTS. KOUNTCHE ALSO NOTED THAT THESE ADVANCES IN ECONOMIC GROWTH, HEALTH AND EDUCATION HAD BEEN MADE WITHOUT RADICAL CHANGE, AND WITHOUT QUOTE REVOLUTIONARY DEMAGOGUERY UNQUOTE.

3. THE PRESIDENT NOTED WITH SATISFACTION IN RECENT GOOD

HARVEST, BUT ALSO MENTIONED RAINFALL SHORTAGES, SCATTERED POCKETS OF FOOD DEFICIT AND LINGERING FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROBLEMS. HE REITERATED THAT FOOD PRODUCTION WOULD REMAIN THE GOVERNMENT'S FIRST PRIORITY, AND THAT GON WAS ATTEMPTING TO ANTICIPATE NEED AND HAVE SECURITY FOOD STOCKS IN PLACE ACROSS THE COUNTRY. HE ALSO SAID THAT NIGER'S NEW FIVE-YEAR PLAN (1979-83) WOULD BE PRINCIPALLY CONCERNED WITH FOOD PRODUCTION.

4. THE FOOD PROBLEM, ACCORDING TO THE PRESIDENT, WAS NOT UNIQUE TO NIGER, TO THE SAHEL, OR TO AFRICA, BUT WAS A WORLD PROBLEM AND AN ENDURING ONE. KOUNTCHE WARNED THAT THE DAY WOULD COME WHEN THE DONOR COMMUNITY--EVEN THOSE THOUGHT TO HAVE INEXHAUSTIBLE RESOURCES--COULD NOT COME TO NIGER'S AID. THIS WAS THE REASON, HIS GOVERNMENT ATTACHED SUCH IMPORTANCE TO LONG-TERM FOOD PRODUCTION PROJECTS--IRRIGATION SCHEMES AND THE KANDADJI DAM IN PARTICULAR.

5. IN THE MORE IMMEDIATE, THE PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED A NUMBER OF TAX AND WAGE MEASURES, MOST TO BENEFIT THE SMALL WAGE EARNER. THESE INCLUDED:

A. INCREASE IN HOURLY MINIMUM WAGE (SMIG) BY 21 PERCENT FROM 48 CFA TO 58 CFA--THE FIRST SUCH RAISE SINCE MAY 1974;

B. INCOME TAX EXEMPTION FOR THOSE EARNING 720 DOLLARS ANNUALLY OR LESS:

C. COMPLETE ABOLITION OF NATIONAL HEAD TAX BY OCTOBER 1--
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A WELCOME TAX RELIEF IN RURAL AREAS; AND
D. ADDITIONAL PAY BONUSES FOR CIVIL SERVANTS ASSIGNED TO DESERT ZONES.

THE PRESIDENT ALSO ASKED FOR THE COOPERATION OF LOCAL BUSINESSMEN TO CONTROL INFLATION (NOW 25 PERCENT ANNUALLY). HE SAID THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS WOULD INTERVENE TO HALT UNDUE PRICE RISES.

6. IN HIS REMARKS TO STUDENTS--MANY IDLE SINCE THE CLOSING OF MOST LYCEES DURING STUDENT STRIKES LAST FALL-- THE PRESIDENT MIXED CARROTS AND STICKS. HE REMINDED THEM OF THEIR ESSENTIAL ROLE IN NIGER'S DEVELOPMENT AND SAID EDUCATION WAS THE GOVERNMENT'S SACRED DUTY. THEY ON THE OTHER HAND SHOULDN'T ALLOW THEMSELVES TO FALL VICTIM TO CLOSED POSITIONS, IMPORTED CLICHES AND DOGMATISM. HE ASKED THEM TO MEDIATE ON PAST ERRORS AND DRAW LESSONS ABOUT NATIONAL VS. INDIVIDUAL INTEREST. IT WAS THEN ANNOUNCED THAT ALL SCHOOLS WOULD REOPEN IN OCTOBER AND THAT MEASURES WERE BEING TAKEN TO ASSURE THE

RETURN TO CLASSES WOULD BE NORMAL AND QUOTE WITHOUT
HARD FEELINGS UNQUOTE.

7. ADDRESSING INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS THE PRESIDENT
REGRETTED THE DETERIORATING SITUATION IN AFRICA. HE
SAID THE REAPPEARANCE OF MERCENARY GROUPS AND COMPETITION
BETWEEN EXTRA-AFRICAN POWERS THREATENED TO PLUNGE THE
CONTINENT INTO THE TRAGIC CONVULSIONS OF THE SIXTIES.
THROUGH ALL THIS HE HELD THAT NIGER'S POLICY POSITION
WOULD BE CLEAR: RESPECT NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY, HONOR TREATIES
AND AGREEMENTS, FOSTER GOOD RELATIONS, AND SUPPORT THOSE
CAUSES PROMOTING JUSTICE AND EQUITY--DECOLONIALIZATION,
AFRICAN UNITY, AFRO-ARAB COOPERATION, MAJORITY RULE IN
ZIMBABWE AND AN END TO APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA. ABOVE
ALL, THE PRESIDENT RUDGE THAT AFRICA REMAIN AFRICAN AND BE
LEFT ALONS TO SOLVE ITS OWN PROBLEMS.JAMES

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